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TAGS: MOPS PREL PTER IZ TU

SUBJECT: THE PKK, TURKEY, AND IRAQ: HOW IRAQ HAS RESPONDED  
TO THE CRISIS SO FAR

REF: A. A) BAGHDAD 3750  
    1B. B) BAGHDAD 3733  
    1C. C) BAGHDAD 3732  
    1D. D) BAGHDAD 3729

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker. Reasons: 1.4 (b) & (d).

11. (S) Summary: Iraqi and Kurdish officials have responded with concrete steps to the pressure we and the Turks have applied following PKK/KGK attacks in Turkey resulting in large numbers of Turkish casualties, plus the terrorists' seizure of Turkish soldiers. The KRG has thus far reacted with increased checkpoints, stepped up scrutiny at airports, closed offices, and shown an active interest in tracking terrorist financing.

An interesting outcome has been increased KRG appreciation for being part of Iraq. As for the GOI, it has demonstrated a new level of sophistication in dealing with an understandably irate neighbor. Septel will examine how we maintain Iraqi pressure on the PKK/KGK and ways to push Iraq (including the KRG) and Turkey closer together. End summary.

12. (S) This is part I of a two-part report. Part I is intended to provide a snapshot of how the GOI and KRG have reacted to the crisis thus far. Septel explores some ideas on the way ahead on the PKK/KGK issue.

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GOI Actions  
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13. (S) Even before the PKK/KGK took eight Turkish soldiers hostage, terrorist attacks on Turkish forces led to talk of a large scale cross-border operation, and concern on the part of Iraqis both in the KRG and Baghdad that the common problem of PKK terrorism must be addressed. Once the hostages were taken, the understandable anger of the Turks produced action in Iraq. Thus far the GOI has:

-- Signed a bilateral anti-terrorism agreement. Although the two sides have not yet agreed on whether the Turks should have the authority to cross the border in hot pursuit of terrorists, this agreement was significant in other ways, such as establishing the continued validity of the 1989 bilateral legal assistance agreement that provides for extradition. It also clearly labeled the PKK/KGK as a terrorist group, the first time the GOI had put this designation in writing.

--Received Foreign Minister Babacan for serious discussions about the common problem. Publicly said that there was "no

place  
in the modern civilized world" for the type of violence  
carried  
out by PKK guerrillas.

-- Dispatched a delegation to Ankara led by Defense Minister Abdul Qadr in order to convey their seriousness about dealing with the PKK. The chilly reception by the Turks did not deter Abdul Qadr from floating a proposal for a new trilateral initiative that, while not well defined, was a sign that the Iraqis were thinking about the need to do much more than they had in the past. Despite grumbling among the delegation about their treatment by the Turks, days later Prime Minister Maliki and Foreign Minister Zebari traveled to Istanbul and engaged in direct talks with the Turks about this problem.

-- Given that the federal structure of Iraq and the agreement on Regional Iraqi Control of the north gave the KRG primary responsibility for security in the Kurdistan Region, GOI leaders joined our efforts to press Kurdish leaders to act against the PKK/KGK.

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KRG Actions  
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¶4. (S) Over the past three years, Kurdish leaders have resisted taking any meaningful measures against the PKK/KGK presence within their region. However, as Turkish casualties mounted and Turkish rhetoric shifted, and as the GOI begins to play a positive role, the KRG began to take real

BAGHDAD 00003802 002 OF 003

steps to contain the terrorists, some of which they had not previously taken:

-- Release of the hostages: The KRG role was important to the success of the effort to get the Turkish soldiers released.

-- Establishment of checkpoints: RRT Erbil and other sources have confirmed that old checkpoints on routes leading to PKK strongholds have received increased manning and new checkpoints have been established. Their mission is to limit the terrorists' access to supplies, services, and publicity. These measures appear to be working -- we have seen reports of retaliatory road closures by the PKK/KGK, and sensitive reporting indicating that the terrorists are curbing their movements in and through the Kurdistan Region.

-- The closure of PKK-front offices: Authorities in the north have closed offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party offices in the three provinces within the KRG (Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniah). To date, we have no evidence that these offices have reopened, as occurred the last time the KRG closed them down.

-- Improved airport screening: We have been working closely with officials at both Sulaymaniah and Erbil airports to improve their capability to screen for PKK members arriving and departing the KRG by air. They have welcomed the technical assistance, including installation of the PISCES system, into which we are loading the names of PKK members for whom Interpol notices have been issued. We have reports of two suspected PKK sympathizers being turned away at Erbil airport, and authorities have requested additional assistance on detecting cash smuggling which we are working to provide.

-- Stopping PKK/KGK Funding: KRG Interior Minister Sinjari requested the names of Interpol-listed PKK members as well as the intelligence necessary to stop financial flows to the

PKK/KGK in  
northern Iraq.

--Requested assistance to identify PKK/KGK terrorists for arrest:

We are responding to Sinjari's request to provide copies of Interpol notices for his security personnel to use in identifying persons for arrest.

-- Public statements: Although a sense of Kurdish nationalism makes KRG officials resist publicly labeling the PKK/KGK a terrorist organization, they have rejected violence and characterized PKK/KGK attacks across the border as "illegal," and urged the PKK to lay down its arms.

--Visit by Kurdish parliamentarians to Ankara.

--A greater willingness to engage with us and GOI officials on this problem. In recent discussions with Ambassador Crocker (reflets), KRG leaders addressed the PKK issue directly and reported the actions they had taken in response.

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A Good Start  
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**¶5. (S) Comment:** The measures the Iraqis have taken to date are not enough to end the PKK/KGK threat to our NATO ally. Nonetheless, the GOI and, especially, the KRG have done more in the past month to curb the PKK/KGK than they have since the fall of the old regime. Significantly, reporting indicates the terrorists have noticed. For the KRG, there also is a new recognition of the value of being part of Iraq. This is not simply due to the Turks refusal to deal with officials in the north, but thanks to President Talabani, PM Maliki and the Interior and Defense Ministers all stepping up to deal with a crisis on Iraq's northern border. For the GOI, these leaders demonstrated a clearer vision of Iraq's national interests than we have seen heretofore -- recognizing Turkey's complaint as legitimate, acknowledging the PKK/KGK is an Iraqi problem, and taking responsibility to do something about it. Both the KRG and GOI have more to do before this problem is resolved, and we will ensure they keep focused on the issue. End comment.

BAGHDAD 00003802 003 OF 003

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